

INDEXA



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Daily Information Session — 14.236 MHz @ 23:30z

TX5C—Clipperton Island 2008

By “Jay” Slough — K4ZLE



The adventure that was to be Clipperton Island began for me at the 2007 DX dinner sponsored by the Southwest Ohio DX Association at Dayton's HamVention® (<http://www.swodxa.com/>). John, N7CQQ, announced he was putting together a DXpedition to revisit Clipperton Island in early 2008. I contacted John the next morning and asked him to add my name as a potential operator. The following September I was sitting in the motel room of Joe, W8GEX, with a bunch of other SEDCO III attendees (<http://sedco.homestead.com/>) and mentioned that I was hoping to be part of the Clipperton team, but, as of that date, I had not heard from John. Dave, K4SV, was in the room and said that if I wanted to go, I could, because he was responsible for pulling the operator team together, and there was an opening. Shortly thereafter, I was officially part of the team and destined for a great adventure. So was my

Above, the Clipperton Team assembled after the stations were set up and BEFORE the wind and rain came!

fellow seasoned SWODXA DXpeditioner, Wayne, K8LEE, who also expressed an interest in going.

I am not a stranger to operating from the little end of the DX pileup having operated from over 35 DXCC entities. However, I usually operated “lone wolf” style in conjunction with a business trip, a “hamcation” with a very understanding non-ham wife or a lay mission trip with a church organization. Clipperton 2008 opened a new chapter in my DX career—one I describe as interesting, challenging, informative and yes, even enjoyable. Enough about me, let's shift attention to the actual trip.

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inside... *Looking back through the history of INDEXA*

TX5C—Clipperton Island 2008 (con'd)

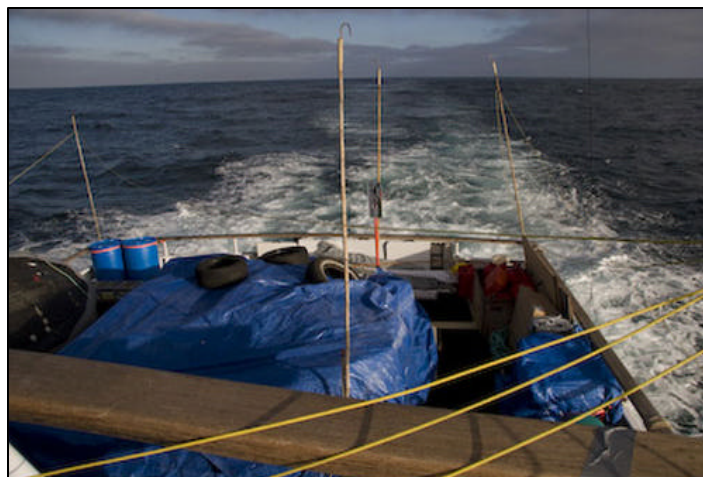
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Our leadership team consisted of John, N7CQQ, who had been to Clipperton three times before, Bob, N6OX, and Dave, K4SV. All three of these guys have made a positive impact on this aspect of our hobby and invested enormous time in planning and organizing our trip. Unfortunately, at the last minute, Dave was preempted from actually making the trip to the island by business obligations. The operating team consisted of the following: John, N7CQQ; Bob, N6OX; "Wild Bill", N2WB; Arnie, N6HC; Paul, W8AEF; Ann, WA1S; Steve, K6SGH; Al, K3VN; Gerard, F2JD; Jean-Pierre, F5AHO; Joel, F5PAC; Neil, VA7DX; Alain, F6BFH (Alain was part of the 1978 FO0XC Clipperton team); Jim, F5JY; Michel, FM5CD; Laurent, F6FVY; Wayne, K8LEE and Jay, K4ZLE. Alain's XYL, Danielle, and Jim's XYL, Maryse, F8FDN, also accompanied us, as did a scientific team led by Dr. Julian Sachs of the University of Washington. Dr. Sachs' scientific team consisted of graduate students Alyssa Atwood and Dan Nelson from the University of Washington and French graduate student, Olivier Cartapanis from CEREGE – Aix en Provence.

The boat trip down was relatively uneventful. Seas were fairly calm but some of the team opted to spend most of the trip in their cabins, exclusive of chow calls and head calls. (*For the uninitiated, a "head" on a boat or ship is the toilet.—Ed.*) Some even missed a few chow calls, but they did not miss the head calls! The chow was exquisite. It was like we used to say in the Marine Corps, "Every day is a holiday and every meal is a banquet." The main chef, Mark, had been part of the Shogun crew when they participated in the earlier FO0AAA operation. The other chef, Rick, was a pretty decent cook, as well.



Mark rustlin' up some grub for the gang.



Mile after mile of cruising at sea—over 1,500 miles—takes one from San Diego to Clipperton Island providing several opportunities to see the "Green Flash".

About halfway down the Baja coast we were spotted by a Coast Guard helicopter and shortly thereafter a Coast Guard cutter came alongside and paralleled our course for awhile. They contacted the bridge on the maritime radio and after a short conversation with our captain, departed the area while we proceeded on course. The sunrises and sunsets at sea were beautiful but to my disappointment, no "green flash" was seen either going or coming. (See sidebar, next page.) Another interesting sighting was of a refrigerator floating past us someplace south of the tip of Baja California. I am not known to be a "greenie", but the garbage at sea and the garbage on

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"Green Flash"

There is a rarely seen phenomenon called the green flash. When it occurs it is observed mostly at sunset and sometime at sunrise. When it happens, the top edge of the sun will sometimes be bright green and the green hue only lasts for a second or so, thus it is called a green flash. The best opportunity to observe one is over a distant horizon such as an ocean or a prairie. The sky must be clear and free of clouds all the way down to the horizon. I have spent many an evening at sea or on a beach looking for the green flash but have never seen one.

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Clipperton made me want to go hug a tree. (However, I still prefer to hug my wife!) On the way to and from Clipperton, we operated as FO5A/mm to the tune of about 5,000 Q's using a trap vertical tied to the railing on the top deck.

After 6 days at sea, we finally arrived at Clipperton on the evening of March 4th. We anchored off the coast until the next morning and then circumnavigated the island. The captain picked a likely landing site at the position we wanted to set up base camp and a scouting party went across the reef. We were all eager to get off the boat and get on the air. But, landing across the shallow reef was dangerous and time consuming. It took us the better part of three days to unload and set up. The extreme heat and numerous storms hampered any kind of quick set up. At times daytime temperatures would be above 100° F. (38° C.) and winds would reach tropical storm proportions. Believe me, we were as eager to get on the air as some of you were to work us. A few of the team were treated for severe sunburn and nausea. Heat exhaustion was an ever-present risk.

Our station arrangements were as follows: There were to be seven operating positions, each powered by an ICOM 756 Pro III and an amplifier. ICOM and Alpha were two of our major sponsors. The CW stations had microHAM interfaces. Antennas were from various suppliers, including a SteppIR beam and vertical and a DX Engineering 80m. vertical, all used at the SSB camp. Most of the rest of the antennas were 2 element SVDAs built and tested by fellow team member, Paul, W8AEF. I found it amusing that one of the complainers about our operation, made a comment to the effect of, "What are they using, an-

tennas two feet off the ground?" The answer is a resounding, YES, we were! And they played very well, thank you – when they were not actually ON the ground as a result of one of the passing storms! Our



Storms came up quickly. Soon after they would form on the horizon, the winds were upon us, and torrential rains followed.

electrical energy came from four diesel generators (two at each operating camp) that were subject to shutdown without warning from the blowing rain. Try as we did to shelter the generators and block the rain, we could not keep them dry. Once they shut down, we had to wait until they dried out before they were usable again. Needless to say, this had a negative impact on our operating time! The operating tents consisted of military surplus heavy canvas tents that John acquired someplace. He said they were from Desert Storm. Most of us agreed they should have stayed in THAT storm, especially after both of them ripped during the first storms on Clipperton! Those of you who have been through hurricanes, know the value of those heavy blue tarps.

Each of us brought our own headsets, microphones and/or paddles. One of our team members, Laurent, F6FVY, is co-author of Win-Test and it flawlessly served us as our logging program. We logged using non-networked laptops that were of about the same vintage as the canvas tents! But they worked, except for one sticking 'T' key. Even though the equipment was powered by the generators, station lighting

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was supplied by the glow of the equipment panels and computer screens and/or our headlamps and flashlights. Each day Laurent would make his rounds and download the logs from each operating position and we would upload them via satellite phone to the web page for you to check your progress. Dave (K4SV), in return, would send us morsels of encouragement from those few who sent that kind of message, but he also sent us messages with bellyaches and complaints from those who have never been on a trip such as this, but know best how one should be conducted. We profusely thank those of you who were encouraging, and believe it or not, we adjusted to valid, positively presented criticism.

I feel I must digress a moment from this narrative of our team effort and provide some personal commentary. These thoughts are my own, and do not necessarily represent the team's opinion. Pilot stations and satellite links provide most of the highly organized DXpeditions timely feedback as to how the DXpedition is being perceived. We learned of many complaints concerning our operation comparing us to the excellent Ducie operation that had just preceded ours. I take nothing away from the Ducie Island team. They did an excellent job. They deserve all the accolades they receive. Yet, we learned Europeans were complaining that we were not giving them the attention they deserved. Also, North Americans were complaining that we were only working Europeans. Prior to our trip, Clipperton was number 10 on the European most needed list and number 22 on the North American list. From that perspective, one could surmise that *everybody* needed Clipperton! Our team did try to give more effort to working Europe. I really felt bad that we tried so hard to make every QSO from Europe some mornings that we missed optimum opening times to the east coast of North America. Yet, if the stations from the three American continents would have honored our "Europe only" directives, we could have worked more from each region with a lower level of QRM. Those stations which continued to call (QRM) when I was specifically calling another region might have found their QSO didn't make it into my log after I worked them to remove their source of interference. Overall, our whole team truly tried to balance our emphasis. One European summed it up nicely for me. Paraphrasing him: "Look, if I cannot hear anything from

the west coast of the US, or anything from Central America, why should I expect to hear Clipperton?" Those good operators who know how to read the bands and who are at their radios at the correct time came to the same conclusion that chap did. Conditions just were not the same for us as they were for Ducie. NO ONE is *entitled* to a QSO with a DX station or DXpedition on their own time table. For those who feel they have all the answers, I suggest you put your time, energy, money and heart where we put ours and organize your own DXpedition and *demonstrate* how it should be done. 'Nuff said!

Our daily routine consisted of four hour operating shifts, with either 4 or 8 hours off to rest or sleep. Two runs a day were usually made from the boat to shore to bring us fresh water, fuel for the generators and fuel for our bodies. As mentioned previously,



Pictured is the SSB Base Camp about one mile from the CW Base Camp. That beautiful storm in the background was far from pretty when viewed close up!

the meals from the boat were outstanding. The weather was horrible most of the time. Temperatures would climb above 100° F. and storms would roll in from the sea with little or no warning. Almost immediately after dark clouds were observed off the coast, the winds would begin to pick up. Our physical set up consisted of separate camps for SSB and CW/digital. We set up on the north east side of the island with about a mile between the two operating sites. Base camp, where we slept and ate, was about halfway between. We specifically located the camps as we did, so that the antennas could be ori-

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ented toward North America and Europe and still remain parallel to each other providing maximum isolation between the camps when operating in those directions. From the CW camp I never noticed any adverse effects while operating on the same band as the SSB camp and heard of no interference to the SSB camp caused by us. In addition to the physical separation between the camps, each station was equipped with a 200 watt rated band pass filter designed by W3NQN and provided courtesy of Array Solutions. Even with the filters, there was occasional interference within a given camp from one station's second harmonic getting into another station's receiver. We would adjust by listening above the second harmonic on the higher band station.



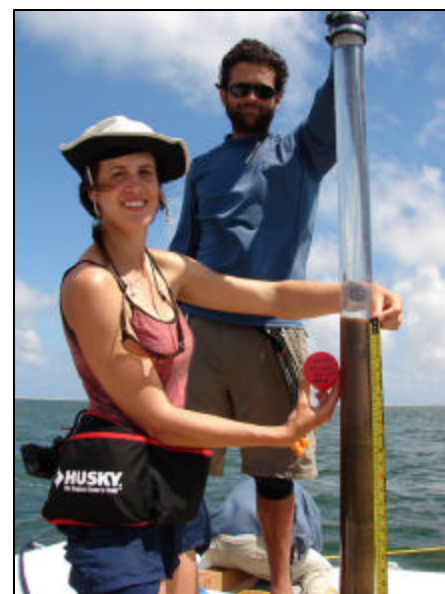
There is lots of history on Clipperton and at least one monument, pictured here.

There is a lot of history related to Clipperton Island. I cannot repeat it all here, except to say that during WW II, Franklin Roosevelt paid a visit to the island and some sort of highly classified operations took place there. I have not found any details in my casual surfing around on the internet. If anyone has more information, I would personally like to hear “. . . the rest of the story” from them. Near the end of the expedition, several of us did a “walkabout”. The island is about 11 miles in circumference and the trip around was very interesting. There are ruins aplenty—ruins of buildings, an old airstrip, shipwrecks and ammunition dumps. I even found bits and pieces of a previous DXpedition's antennas and counterpoises. After a Mexican fishing boat went aground, the island received a few rats, which have

taken their toll on the crab and boobie bird population. However, as soon as the sun starts its decline in the west, the crabs appear from their hiding places. They do not pose much more than a nuisance factor, especially when you are operating at night when they think feet are something they should nibble on. The boobie birds were always around, but their presence was mostly felt during the night when one would fall out of the trees and land on one of our sleeping tents or at sunrise when their raucous clamor sounded like a SSB pileup!

I cannot say enough good things about the scientific team that accompanied us. They were very hard working and we had a synergistic relationship with

them. Their camp was collocated with our base camp. While there, they took core samples from the lagoon. Clipperton has a mostly fresh water lagoon in the middle of the island. Dr. Sachs is studying the movement of El Niño as it shifts further north. By taking core samples he is able to see what the climatic conditions were several hundreds of



Two members of the scientific team process core samples from the lagoon. The samples are being used to study weather patterns over time.

years in the past. A couple of us are looking to join him in future trips in the Pacific region. More information will be forthcoming, if that develops.

Because of an impending storm the captain pulled us from the island a few days earlier than we planned. We ran out of time before the captain said we had to depart the area and left, by my reckoning, about \$10,000 of equipment and supplies on the beach. We are sure some fishing boat, found our

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bounty and it was rescued from becoming more trash on the beach. Surf conditions were so hazardous when we left that we were down to our last propeller for the Zodiac's motor and even this last prop was bent!

The storm was a doozie! The return trip was nothing like a ride on an amusement park paddle boat. I was on a US destroyer in a storm in the North Sea as a young lad where the waves were washing over the signal bridge and I did not get sea sick. (*The signal bridge is the very top deck of a destroyer. It is open to the elements and is where the signal flags are hoisted and where the intership flashing code light is situated. —Ed.*) Yet, on our return trip from Clipperton to San Diego, I did indeed get sea sick. Unfortunately, for me, that was the day the chef served surf and turf using lobster harvested from the Clipperton reefs. Needless to say, I did not fully appreciate that gourmet meal. After another six days we arrived back in San Diego. It did not seem to take as long to unload as it did to load. Could it be because of what we left on the beach or that we were eager to return to our home QTHs?

Early on, Bob, N6OX, said he had a few goals for our expedition. Those goals were to have fun, to be safe, to depart as friends, and to make as many Q's as we could. For the most part we accomplished those goals, with the exception that Bob broke his ankle in the rough surf during unloading operations upon our arrival on Clipperton. Also, we did not make as many Q's as we wanted to. C'est la vie! We still had fun, left as friends and 71,000 plus QSOs were logged!

Before we end the saga of this adventure, I would be remiss if I did not thank our many sponsors. Some I have mentioned in the narrative, some I have not. We especially thank organizations like INDEXA who make trips like this possible. A more complete list of sponsors can be found on the web site, www.clipperton2008.org. The web site also has some interesting journals and additional pictures from individual team members.

If you did not work us, it was not because we did not want to work you. To those who got through, congratulations! To those who did not, maybe next time. Will there be a next time? Who knows? It was indeed an adventure! I would consider going again! I have included the statistics of our DXpedition for those that enjoy analyzing them.

—73 Jay

| Win-Test 3.20.0-dev http://www.win-test.com | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|------|-------|------|
| BAND | SSB | CW | RTTY | OTHER | DUP |
| 160 | 0 | 1982 | 0 | 0 | 92 |
| 80 | 4588 | 3558 | 0 | 0 | 408 |
| 40 | 6231 | 5915 | 1297 | 0 | 511 |
| 30 | 0 | 5465 | 1021 | 0 | 220 |
| 20 | 7400 | 5161 | 1079 | 0 | 654 |
| 17 | 6237 | 4046 | 25 | 0 | 441 |
| 15 | 5011 | 4559 | 125 | 0 | 333 |
| 12 | 2316 | 1741 | 63 | 0 | 136 |
| 10 | 2060 | 1744 | 170 | 0 | 131 |
| 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 33843 | 34171 | 3780 | 0 | 2926 |
| TOTAL QSO: 71 794 | | | | | |

| Band | EU | NA | SA | AF | AS | OC |
|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| 160 | 4.80% | 87.60% | 1.10% | 0.30% | 5.20% | 0.90% |
| 80 | 13.90% | 67.40% | 1.40% | 0.60% | 14.60% | 2.10% |
| 40 | 25.70% | 50.30% | 1.70% | 0.80% | 20.00% | 1.50% |
| 30 | 16.70% | 60.10% | 1.10% | 0.30% | 20.50% | 1.30% |
| 20 | 14.40% | 72.50% | 2.10% | 0.50% | 8.70% | 1.80% |
| 17 | 13.10% | 72.00% | 2.10% | 0.60% | 11.30% | 0.90% |
| 15 | 5.30% | 75.70% | 3.80% | 1.00% | 13.30% | 0.90% |
| 12 | 0.10% | 86.10% | 3.50% | 0.40% | 9.20% | 0.70% |
| 10 | 0.30% | 87.80% | 6.60% | 0.00% | 4.50% | 0.70% |

Looking Forward and Looking Backward. . .

With the end of 2008, INDEXA completed 25 years of its existence. The next 25 years is off to a fast start with INDEXA's support of the upcoming DXpedition to Desecheo. One of the leaders of the operation heading to Desecheo is Bob Allphin (K4UEE), Chairman of INDEXA's Board of Directors. Bob's co-leader for Desecheo is Glenn Johnson (W0GJ), a life member of INDEXA. So, we know INDEXA will "be there" in Desecheo. A lot of folks are waiting for a chance to put Desecheo into their logs.

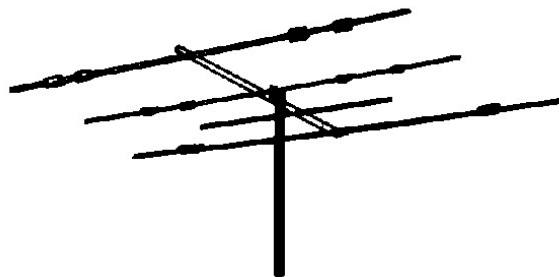
Looking backward, we can be proud to have had a role in supporting over 175 DXpeditions over the past 25 years. That record is due wholly because members such as yourself have supported INDEXA with your dues, donations, and life membership fees. Our history is a rich one filled with its share of successes, struggles with "Mr. Murphy", and humorous anecdotes. Much of this history is recorded in the 83 newsletters that have been published since the inception of INDEXA.

Last fall, a member of a number of years asked if this history had been preserved. He wanted to have copies of the old newsletters *if* your officers could find a way to reproduce them. Fortunately, a hard copy of almost all newsletters was in the association's archives, but several early editions were missing. Except for those issues produced as PDF files over the past few years, all the old

issues were paper copies. Yet, the inquiry stirred interest among your officers to see what can be done about making this history more generally available. We were pleasantly surprised to find that one of our long-standing Life Members, Arnfinn "Arnie" Kristoffersen, LA8CJ, of Oslo, Norway was able to come up with the two missing issues. As a way of reciprocating Arnie's kindness, we were able to provide him with two issues of the newsletter he no longer had in his files.

We think we have a solution in our sights. Appropriately, for an association of Amateur Radio aficionados we must ask you to "stay tuned" while we iron out a few details. Looking forward again, in the very near future we will be communicating with you advising you what we hope you will find to be an attractive solution.

—The Editor



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